

STATEMENT
by the Delegation of Ukraine
at the Plenary Session of the Seventeenth Session of the Conference of the Parties
to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
(17–28 August 2026, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia)

Madam Chair / Mr. Chair,
Distinguished delegates, dear colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you on behalf of the Delegation of Ukraine.

Ukraine expresses its gratitude to the Government of Mongolia, the host country of COP17, as well as to the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification for the preparation of this important meeting. The theme of COP17 — “Restoring Land. Restoring Hope” — is of particular significance for Ukraine. For our country, land is not merely a natural resource. It is the foundation of food security, water resilience, the life of communities, economic recovery, and lasting peace.

Ukraine remains committed to the objectives of the Convention, including achieving land degradation neutrality, sustainable soil management, strengthening resilience to drought, and restoring degraded territories. At the same time, we are compelled to emphasize that the implementation of these tasks in Ukraine is taking place under an unprecedented challenge — the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which continues for the thirteenth year and which since 24 February 2022 has grown into illegal, unprovoked and unjustified full-scale military invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation.

Russian Federation’s armed aggression against Ukraine has not only a humanitarian, security and economic dimensions. It directly destroys land. As a result of hostilities, landmines and explosive remnants of war, shelling, fires, the destruction of infrastructure and the contamination of territories, Ukraine is facing large-scale damage to soils, loss of land productivity, degradation of agroecosystems, impeded access to water resources, and long-term risks of desertification, particularly in the southern and eastern regions.

The environmental consequences of Russian armed aggression are severe and long-lasting. Preliminary estimates indicate environmental damage exceeding EUR 130 billion, while around 25% of Ukraine’s territory is contaminated with landmines and explosive remnants of war. Hostilities, fires, and the destruction of infrastructure have caused widespread soil degradation, loss of agricultural productivity, water pollution, and an increased risk of desertification.

A particularly devastating example of the crime of ecocide is the destruction of the dam of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant by the Russian Armed Forces on 6 June 2023. This grave and unpunished act of ecocide and war crime led to the uncontrolled release of 18 km³ of water, flooding over 600 km² of territory, disrupting water supply to 143 settlements, and directly affecting more than 850,000 people. It caused extensive contamination of land and water resources, severe damage to ecosystems, and long-term disruption of irrigation systems critical for southern Ukraine. Environmental damage from this crime of Russian aggressor is estimated at nearly EUR 2 billion.

The International Criminal Court has already opened an investigation of this crime following a referral by the Prosecutor General of Ukraine. The attack on the hydroelectric power plant as a civilian object is considered a component of a war crime, while the environmental consequences of this unlawful act are regarded as part of the crime of aggression. No recovery can be complete without ensuring accountability for the damage caused.

The amount of environmental damage caused by the Russian military, as well as by Russian occupation administrations in the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine cannot be calculated. Its comprehensive assessment, on-site verification of losses, and the planning and implementation of recovery measures will be possible only after the liberation of this territory and the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders – which is Ukraine's constant goal in the fight against Russian aggressor.

The consequences of Russian armed aggression are directly relevant to the mandate of the UNCCD. Land degradation, drought, loss of soil fertility, contamination of territories with explosive ordnance, and the destruction of water infrastructure are not a local environmental problem. They are factors that affect food security, migration, community stability, and the ability of states to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Ukraine calls upon the Parties to the Convention to strengthen attention to the impact of armed conflicts on land degradation, water security and resilience to drought. We call for condemnation of the actions of Russia, which, by its crimes committed on Ukrainian soil, demonstrates a disregard for the basic principles and values for which we have gathered here today.

We also call for support for the restoration of Ukrainian lands on the basis of science, monitoring, transparent damage assessment, humanitarian demining, soil restoration, water infrastructure rehabilitation and the restoration of natural ecosystems. Ukraine's recovery must be green, just and accountable. It must combine post-war reconstruction with the implementation of the Convention, the Paris Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In accordance with the resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly concerning the aggression against Ukraine, our Delegation calls upon the international community to continue respecting and supporting the sovereignty and restoration of the territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, including territorial sea, to demand an end to the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against our state, and to contribute to the restoration of Ukrainian land as part of our shared global responsibility.

Ukraine wishes COP17 every success in its work and practical decisions that will help states not only to halt land degradation, but also to restore hope for people, communities and future generations.

Thank you for your attention.